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Department of
Education

Silent Steeds
Cycling in Nova Scotia to 1900

Heather Watts

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You'll look sweet, upon the seat
Of a bicycle built for two!

Forerunners of the Bicycle

In 1897 Nova Scotians were humming those lines from the popular song as they mounted their pneumatic-tired safety bicycles and set off for a spin in the park or along a country road. They were part of the Great Bicycle Boom - the Victorian craze that reached its peak in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Bicycles in one form or another had been available for some time but it was during the 1890s that they reached a degree of comfort, efficiency and economy that made them accessible to both sexes and all age groups. This fashionable and exciting invention was to have a significant influence on the attitudes and industry of the twentieth century.

The hobby-horse was the earliest vehicle to resemble the modern bicycle. It evolved from the toy ridden by generations of little boys - a stick with a horse's head and a small wheel at the back. The first hobby-horse bicycles for adults kept the animal head but added a front wheel and a saddle, allowing the rider to "walk" the machine along.

It is uncertain whether the Comte de Sivrac in Paris, with his "célérifère", or Baron Karl von Drais, Master of the Woods and Forest to the Duke of Baden, was the first to invent and ride an adult hobby-horse. We do know that Baron von Drais demonstrated his "Draisienne" in Paris in 1818, securing a French patent for it. This invention had the great advantage of being steerable, and was light enough to achieve speeds of up to 8 miles per hour on good roads. Other inventors took up the challenge and home-designed and home-made "vélocipèdes" were popular in Paris for some time.

The idea spread to England. Denis Johnson, a London coachmaker, opened a school where even adventurous ladies could try out the new machines in private. Like Baron von Drais, Johnson patented his version of the Draisienne in 1818. He called it the "Pedestrian Curricle" and it became quite a fad with Regency bucks. High society soon lost interest in this novelty, but the idea of a man-powered vehicle continued to develop in the minds of the inventive.

Kirkpatrick MacMillan, a Scottish blacksmith working in rural Dumfriesshire, experimented with a system of levers and treadles attached to rods that turned the rear wheel of one of the old hobby-horses. When he had perfected this model in 1839, he could cover the 14 miles between his home and Dumfries with his feet off the ground, becoming the first man to propel a bicycle in this way. He made a trip to Glasgow in 1842, a distance of 70 miles, and caused a flurry of excitement when he was arrested for knocking over a small child who ran in front of his machine — the first recorded cycling accident. MacMillan had neither the means nor the incentive to

develop or publicize his invention, and interest in the two-wheeled "dandy horse" died out in Great Britain.

There were other isolated inventors who experimented with the hobby-horse, but the first commercially successful velocipedes were developed and manufactured in the Michaux carriage workshops in Paris about 1863. Either Pierre Michaux, his son Ernest or their assistant Pierre Lallement (it is not known which) suggested that the best method of propulsion would be to fix cranks and pedals to the front axle and turn the wheel by pressure of the feet. The idea seemed to work and the Michaux company continued to make improvements. By 1868 they had built a new factory employing 300 people, which produced five velocipedes a day.[1] In spite of the expense - a Michaux model cost 25 pounds in England - this vehicle, capable of achieving 12 miles per hour on a smooth straight road, attracted much attention. The Michauxs displayed their model at the Paris Exposition in 1867, and the velocipede craze began.

1866-1870

Velocipedes

In the year before Confederation, miners coming off shift at the Caledonia Mine in Sydney stumbled out into the sunshine to stare in astonishment at the sight of the mine manager's son, Henry S. Poole, riding around the yard on an extraordinary iron vehicle. Poole's father had just returned from a holiday in England, where he had fallen under the spell of the latest invention - the Paris Boneshaker. He brought one home to Sydney, where he delighted in demonstrating it to the curious citizens, thus earning the distinction of being the man who introduced the velocipede to Nova Scotia.

Pierre Lallement, Michaux's disgruntled employee or co-inventor, as he saw it, had taken out the first American velocipede patent in 1866; before long there were several manufacturers in New York and Boston. The Hanlon Brothers of New York, well known acrobats and entertainers, added their own improvements to the velocipede and became manufacturers in their own right. In August 1868 they toured Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, performing at the Temperance Hall in Halifax and the Drill Shed in Windsor. One of the local newpapers noted that they had introduced their "patent Two-wheeled Velocipedes, now the greatest sensation in Paris."[2]

Within a few months velocipede rinks had opened at the City Market Building, the Variety Hall, the Colonial Market and the Drill Shed in Halifax, while the Sons of Temperance, in whose hall the Hanlons had performed, purchased a number of velocipedes to place in their gymnasium for the use of members. The boys in New Glasgow used the Drill Shed in that town, and in Windsor the young men

"I've got no horse to feed,
"I've got a velocipede!"
- Popular Song

converted the sail loft behind W.H. Curry's into a rink. Here would-be bicyclists could practise the difficult art of managing their new machines in some degree of privacy, before they ventured out onto the streets to brave the jeers of disrespectful youngsters. One of the youngsters excluded from the Windsor rink was Percy Blanchard. He wrote later: "I distinctly recall the roar of those machines as they circled inside that sail loft, my own position being among the outdoor listeners, with the other boys."[3]

The velocipede never needed a bell to warn pedestrians of its approach, but noise was just one of the problems of these early machines. They were also heavy and extremely difficult to steer. The frame was made of solid iron, the wheels were wood rimmed with a flattened iron band like a cartwheel, the seat was made of wood or iron and there were no springs. It was certainly a boneshaker. Chafing was another drawback because with the pedals mounted on the front axle, the slightest turn of the steering handles caused the wheel to rub against the rider's legs. Utility rather than fashion dictated narrow

1 The Hanlon Brothers used velocipedes in their travelling acrobatic show.

tight trousers and high boots for the velocipedestrian; this too could result in embarrassment, as Blanchard recalled:

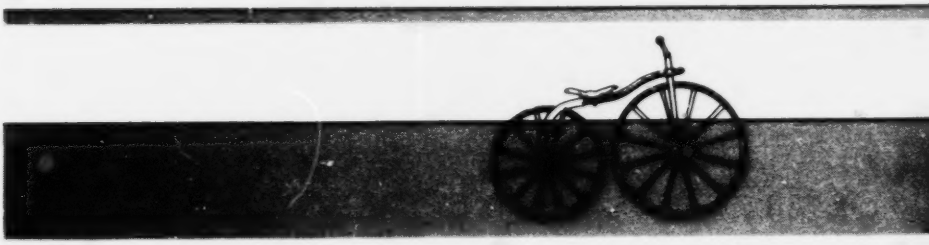
The young dandies all wore skin tight pants (and) one of the boneshaker enthusiasts, putting more muscle than good judgement into his recreation, badly split the material composing his pants much to his own mortification and the hilarity of the unsympathetic youngsters.[4]

The velocipede rider in Halifax needed a thick skin as well:

Frequently the rider is held on by his friends, while he 'trundles' himself along, and even with this precaution the machine 'wabbles' to use an expressive term coined by a bye-stander at the Barrington Street School the other day, and the rider often 'licks' the sawdust.[5]

Keeping one's balance while being held up was difficult enough, but mounting unassisted was probably the most demanding skill needed. The diameter of the front wheel on the Michaux models was about 36 inches, and the rear wheel was only slightly smaller. There was no freewheel mechanism and the pedals revolved automatically at the speed of the front wheel. Once he became adept, the rider would grip the handles and set off at a fast run beside the machine, wait until a considerable momentum had built up, and then vault into the saddle, finding the pedals when he was properly mounted. This effectively excluded all but the young and agile male from participating in the sport. Nevertheless, as the *British Colonist* of Halifax noted in 1869, "the velocipede mania in this city exhibits no symptoms of abatement."

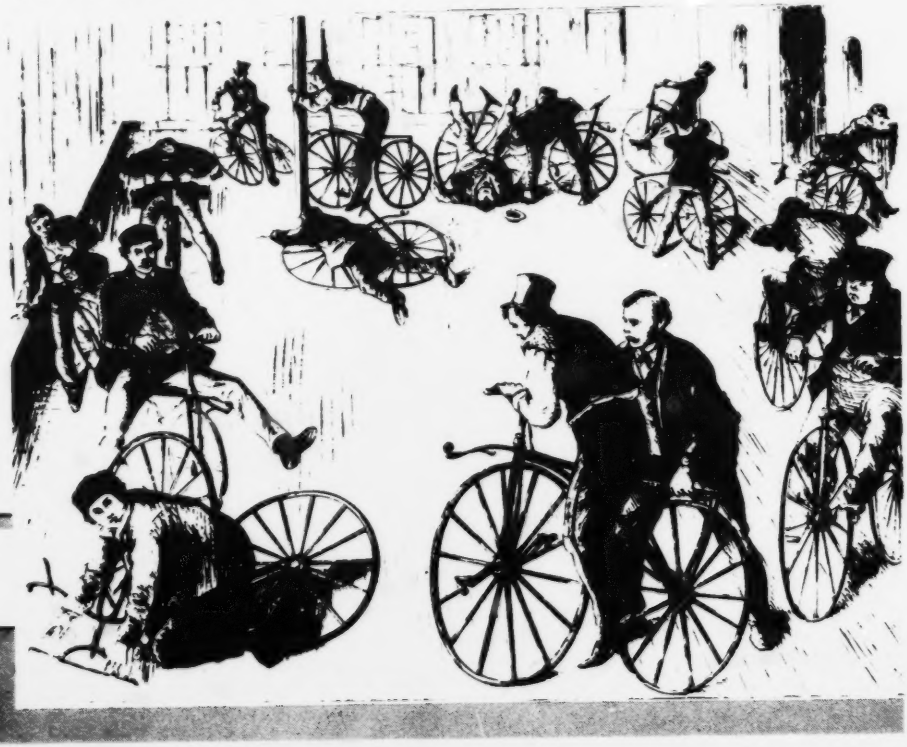
The coastal steamers helped spread the craze throughout the province. In April 1869 a "Locomotive Rider" arrived in Lunenburg by the morning packet from Halifax, bringing three velocipedes with him, and by two o'clock in the afternoon he had opened a Velocipede School. The young people of Lunenburg paid twelve and half cents to try their skill, and the "scholars" could attend at any time from nine o'clock in the morning to ten at night.[6] The following week, the schooner *Rival* brought a consignment of velocipedes to Liverpool. The *Colonial Standard* of Pictou printed an article entitled "Rules for Becoming a Velocipedist"; it promised that after an hour or two's practice, the tyro would be able to accomplish a distance of from



thirty to forty yards "without running the risk of an upset", if the rules were correctly followed. Captain Amberman of Granville purchased a small Hanlon-type model in Boston and brought it home for his son, while Alexander Irvine rode a slightly different model in the streets of Annapolis.

The velocipede's boneshaking characteristics began to concern medical men, who debated in the newspapers about the effects the sport might have on its devoted adherents. The disrespectful were sometimes heard to refer to the velocipede as "the hernia horror", and young men were warned not to "exert themselves in trials of speed."[7]

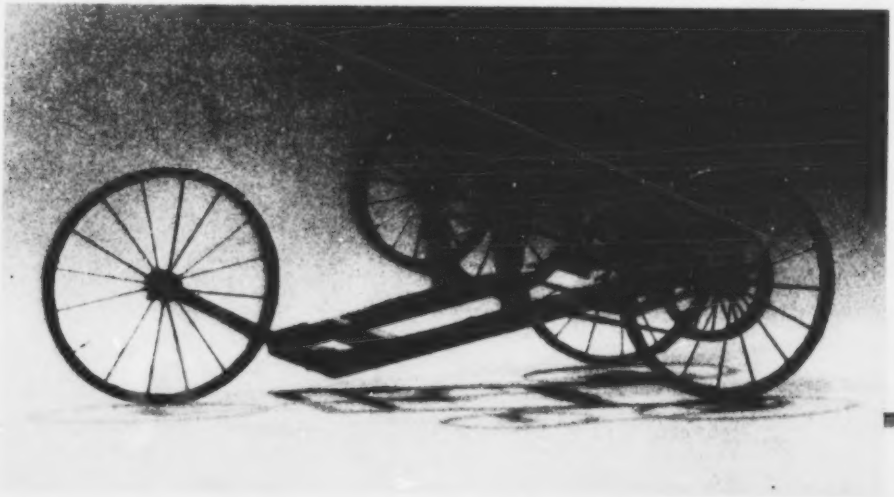
The warnings went unheeded. The first velocipede races had already taken place in Paris in 1868, and Nova Scotians were as interested in trials of speed as anyone else. Enthusiasts in Windsor organized a race across the five spans of the covered toll bridge, where the rumbling of the velocipedes in the wooden tunnel could be heard echoing down the Avon River. In New Glasgow, Alexander Mackenzie circled the Drill Shed thirty and one half times in five minutes to win first prize in a contest, while Ed Leather took the prize for the fastest time, a speed of nine miles per hour.



2 A little practice inside the velocipede rink prevented humiliation on the public streets

Before long, local mechanics began to make improvements to the new velocipedes. John Forbes, the inventive manager of the Starr Manufacturing Company in Dartmouth, built one with adjustable treadles and springs, claimed to be the first iron and steel bicycle in America. It was considered quite a curiosity when it was ridden at the Grand Bicycle Contest at the Exhibition Building in 1881, and its noisy progress was contrasted with the sophisticated modern high wheel bicycles of the era.

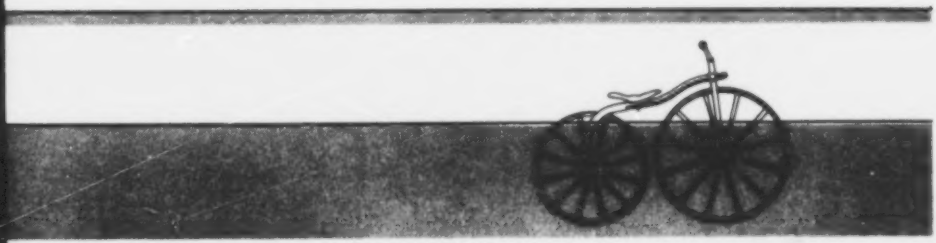
Velocipedes sometimes had more than two wheels - in fact the word bicycle had been coined towards the end of the 1860's to distinguish the two-wheeled type from the others.[8] George Grant, a New Glasgow merchant, went to some trouble to have his three-wheeled velocipede patented in 1868. Tricycles and quadricycles of similar type had been experimented with in England and the United States, and some became quite popular. Grant's model was like a small wagon in which the wheels were turned by hand cranks attached to belts and cogs on the axle, the driver sitting on a little coachman's box in the centre of the vehicle. Grant claimed in his petition to the Lieutenant Governor that his invention was not only safe but could be driven with "incredible" speed. He had shown it to several "Gentlemen of skill" in New Glasgow, all of whom had expressed their approval. In spite of the fact that Grant received his patent, nothing more was heard of his velocipede. Many original and



3 Model of velocipede invented and patented by George Grant of New Glasgow, 1868 It was never produced.

useful inventions went unrecognized because the means to develop and market them were lacking.

The velocipede craze, which reached its height in the spring of 1869, was short-lived. Bicycles did not make the news again until the high wheels appeared in Halifax more than a decade later. Weight, difficulty of handling and the discomfort involved in riding on any but the smoothest surface meant that their use was restricted to the athlete and the novelty seeker. But the velocipede movement had a greater effect than was at first apparent. It had shown that self-propelled vehicles were not only a technical possibility but also attracted a great deal of attention, and in larger centres experimentation continued.



1880-1892

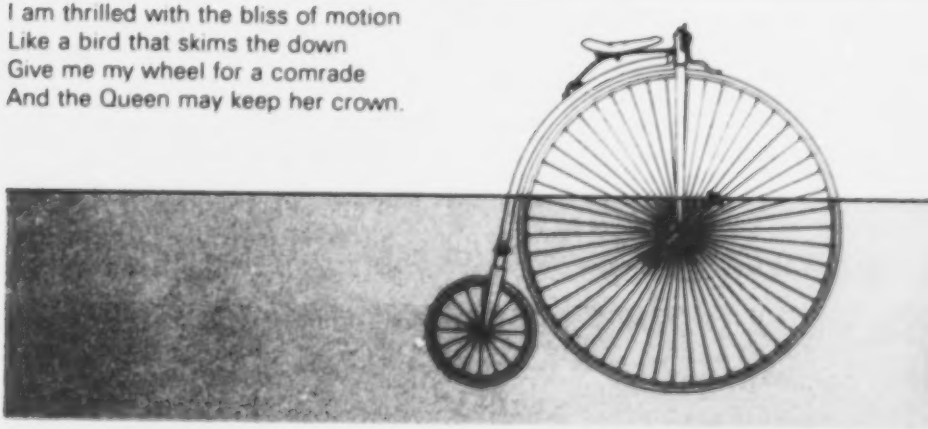
High Wheels or Ordinaries

Canadians first became aware of the great improvements in the velocipede when A.T. Lane rode his new English high wheel bicycle in the streets of Montreal in 1876. At the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition that year high wheels from England were displayed, catching the eye of Colonel Albert A. Pope. Pope, who was later to be credited with founding the American bicycle industry, immediately set off for England to study the new industry at its source.

The Franco-Prussian War had shifted the innovative centre of the bicycle trade from Paris to Coventry, where James Starley's Ariel model was launched in 1871. This 50-pound all-metal bicycle, the first of the high wheels, had tensioned wire spokes set into a metal rim, hard rubber tires and a rear wheel brake. In order to gain increased speed, the front wheel was larger than the rear, so that with each revolution of the pedals the front wheel covered more ground.

By the time Pope arrived in England bicycle manufacturing was well established, and the high wheel, its size dependent on the length of the rider's leg, was a success. Pope fell under its spell and determined to manufacture it in the U.S. He first imported English models while he bought up patent rights, and then in 1878 he organized the Pope Manufacturing Company in Hartford, Connecticut, using the best features of the English machines to design the first of his famous "Columbia" models. Within four years Pope claimed that, of the 12,000 bicycles in America, the Columbias outnumbered all the imported machines combined by two to one.[9]

I am thrilled with the bliss of motion
Like a bird that skims the down
Give me my wheel for a comrade
And the Queen may keep her crown.



While the young men of Halifax had undoubtedly imported a few English high wheels, two of Pope's Columbias are the first bicycles to be identified in Nova Scotia. In 1881 Clarence Dimock and Fred Carver imported the high wheels that were to start the bicycle craze in Windsor, making it one of the cycling centres in the province. Dimock started with a 50-inch wheel and Carver, who was a much taller man, had a 58-inch and then a 59-inch wheel.

The features of these machines were typical of the middle period of high wheel design. The rider mounted by means of a small step above the rear wheel, moving himself forward onto the saddle which was attached to an adjustable spring on the backbone. A small spoon brake on the front wheel was lever-operated. Hollow metal tubing made the machine lighter, as did the U-shaped rims that held the solid rubber tires. Ball-bearings in the hub and pedals reduced friction. The small straight steering handle was lengthened to provide better control; later in the decade, curved and "cowhorn" bars with spade grips were introduced to cater to racing efficiency as well as to fashion.

4 High wheels on tour -- the Bluenose Bicycle Tour rides through Fredericton, N.B.

The group of young riders that formed around Dimock and Carver used the upper floor of the newly built cotton mill, empty because of a delay in the arrival of machinery from England, as a riding school. Here they learned to master their tricky high wheels. Mounting and dismounting were particularly difficult and the slightest obstruction in the road could send the rider for a "header" over the steering handle. As one Windsor rider remarked, "the long easy swing of the high machine was a real pleasure. At the same time it was further to fall, as we could all testify."[10] But no-one had ever travelled so quickly under his own power before. Raised high above the pedestrian, on a level with riders on horseback and able to proceed at speeds of up to 17 miles per hour on a smooth surface, the bicyclist was king. High wheel riders felt themselves to be a privileged group and they were devoted to their machines.

They soon began to form bicycle clubs, popular everywhere in the 1880s. These clubs organized race meets and riding displays, provided companionship for tours and outings and provided some regulation and control to riders who might otherwise alarm sober townsfolk and frighten the horses. The Truro Bicycle Club, formed in 1883, advertised for new members, attempting to allay fears of learning to ride:

Get your wheel and join the club and we guarantee that in a week at the outside you will be counted in the club runs...Besides, the difficulty of learning to ride the bicycle is greatly exaggerated. Two or three hours' practice will be amply sufficient to give the tyro confidence to balance and

5 Military-style clothing was favoured by early riders like E.H. Lahey of Halifax.

6 Bicycles were popular in studio portraits of enthusiasts like Clifford Shand of Windsor.

propel his machine, to dismount (in variegated styles) and possibly mount if he is very determined. True a mere gutter or treacherous stone may empty him out of the saddle once or twice, but it won't hurt. With a week's practice of an hour a day, he will be able to ride his bicycle anywhere."

Military-style uniforms were adopted, with knee breeches, a tightly fitting jacket and a small peaked cap. The Truro Club had uniforms of dark blue and club colours of blue and white. The Avonians in Windsor chose navy and scarlet and adopted full military organization, with officers of the road, a bugler and a standard bearer. On club outings, the Captain controlled his riders by a system of whistle signals.

The Canadian Wheelmen's Association (CWA), forerunner of the present-day Canadian Cycling Association, had been formed in 1882, but in the mid-1880s four-fifths of its membership was based in Ontario. At first Maritime wheelmen divided their allegiance among the major cycling organizations. The Rev. W.M. DeBlois in Annapolis was Consul of the British Cyclists Touring Club, to which the Halifax Captain, William Black, also belonged. Many New Brunswick riders favoured the League of American Wheelmen and the Chief Consul of the Maritime District, C. Coster of Saint John, could report only five CWA members in 1886. Reports of wheelmen's activities did appear in the *Canadian Wheelman* magazine from time to time, perhaps in the hope that more interest would be forthcoming.

7 Proud wheelmen like this Windsor group often gave "fancy riding" demonstrations for the public. (c1889).

In Halifax, drill demonstrations were given by the local club under Captain Black, and "fancy riding", which required perfect control of the machine, was popular. The *Hants Journal* gave the following report of an outdoor promenade concert in Windsor:

About a score of Wheelmen appeared on the track soon after 8 o'clock with their wheels variously illuminated with Chinese and Japanese lanterns - some with lights suspended from the ends of sticks placed across the wheels in front of the riders, others with triangular arrangements which placed one light in front of the head of the rider, giving one the idea of a one-horse-power locomotive as the wired steed came whizzing along almost noiselessly. The parade was certainly the feature of the evening and excited favourable comment.[12]

It was not long before the first of the American bicycle tourists disembarked from the steamer at Yarmouth. Lyman Hotchkiss Bagg, attired in a conspicuous white riding costume, mounted his 46-inch Columbia and set off for Halifax via the Annapolis Valley. Bagg was an observant and opinionated writer as well as an above-average wheelman, and he later published a complete account of this early tour with descriptions of the accommodations, food, road conditions and weather. He contacted other wheelmen wherever he stopped and discovered from them the best roads for bicycling so that, when his article and book were published in the United States, he could recommend many varied tours.

Bagg claimed the honour of being "first on the Island" by riding his Columbia during a half-hour steamer stop in Port Hawkesbury. He confidently recommended Cape Breton as "an attractive field for the adventurous tourist. His wheel will everywhere be greeted as a

8 Seated on the tandem tricycle on the left is Sir Frederick Fraser, blind superintendent of the School for the Blind. Halifax Ramblers in the Public Gardens, 1890.

wonder-compelling novelty."[13] This was certainly true, as high wheels remained uncommon on the island. A small girl in Baddeck watched in amazement as a newcomer to the village, George Kennan, sped rapidly past her door astride a gleaming high wheel. It appeared to the child as if a limbless body was floating in mid-air. "What is it?" she gasped. On being told, she asked, "But has he no legs?"

Elsewhere in the province, individuals and groups explored the countryside with enthusiasm, despite imperfect road conditions. The favourite run for the Truro Club was to Greenfield, while the Halifax riders travelled on the St. Margaret's Bay road toward Chester. Will Rennie made the trip from Economy to Truro in five hours, and J.B. Pattillo rode from Bridgewater to Halifax in nine and a half hours, "not counting stoppages." Two Windsor riders, who travelled on their 54 and 56-inch wheels from Yarmouth up the South Shore, reported that the road was almost impassable: "It is rocky, very hilly, and runs through woods that allow only very unfrequent glimpses of the sea."[14] Sir Frederick Fraser, the blind Superintendent of the Halifax School for the Blind, took his exercise with the Ramblers Club on a tandem tricycle with a companion to do the steering.

Racing on indoor or cinder tracks was an easier way to get top speeds from the new machines imported into the province. The first bicycle races to be held in Nova Scotia were organized in 1881 by the Halifax Bicycle Club at the New Exhibition Building on Tower Road. The spectators were thrilled as contestants battled through the heats. F.J. Ward, his tire tied to the rim of his wheel, was victorious, nosing out J.W. Stairs who was riding with a broken steering handle.

9 High wheel bicycle races here! The Exhibition Building, Tower Road, Halifax, 1881.

Truro riders used the horse racetrack in Bible Hill to practise for the Wanderer's Club Sports, held annually in Halifax. The first Maritime Bicycle Championships were held in Halifax in 1884; two Truro riders, Rennie and Blair, had the fastest times. Clifford Shand of Windsor swept the Nova Scotia Championships when he began racing his high wheel in 1887. In the following five years he entered 21 contests, winning 15 firsts and four second-place medals - "more than he will be able to conveniently display on his person on festive occasions," commented the Windsor newspaper.

Both racing and touring exposed the rider to all the dangers of the high wheel. "Bicycle face" was a widely recognized affliction - the tense and agonized expression of a bicyclist attempting to control the

10 Clifford Shand's Star high wheel had the smaller wheel out front for greater stability (1887).

progress of his machine down a steep incline, or heading into a tight corner on the track, crowded by rivals. The rider's position, directly over the front axle and up to five feet above the road, ensured a painful descent, usually straight over the handlebars in a header.

Throughout the 1870s and 1880s, attempts were being made in England to improve the popular "ordinary" bicycle and design a "safety" model, which would eliminate the danger of a header without sacrificing speed or comfort. The saddle was moved further down the backbone and various methods were used to gear up the front driving wheel to compensate for the loss of power. Smaller driving wheels lowered the rider's centre of gravity and a larger rear wheel gave the bicycle more weight and stability. At least two Star high wheel safety bicycles were in use in the province during the 1880's. These American models attempted to make riding less hazardous by placing the small wheel in front and seating the rider on the large rear wheel, which was driven by foot-operated levers attached to straps and a ratchet gear on the hub. If extra power were required for hill climbing or during competition, both levers could be depressed simultaneously.

11 By 1890 the Halifax Ramblers Club had some of the new safeties, still with solid rubber tires.

The name "safety bicycle" attached itself to the smaller bicycles with equal-sized wheels that began to come on the market in the mid-1880s, many of them spin-offs from the very successful English Rover produced by Starley's Meteor Works at Coventry. Once again, these were not long in coming to Nova Scotia. When F.A. Doane brought his $150 American Victor safety to Truro in 1889, Mr. Polehampton in Brookfield already had a small English safety, while a Rover was in use in Windsor. The high wheel riders tended to treat the safeties with derision or amusement, never expecting that the small

and to them unattractive little machines could ever challenge the graceful ordinary. Frank Doane was hailed by a high wheel rider one day on Prince Street: "What are you doing down there in the mud? Come on up here!"[15] But the days of the old high wheeler were numbered. The lads on the street in Windsor shouted, "Go it, little fellow!" whenever they caught sight of a new low safety. Soon, the brotherhood of high wheel bicyclists would have to give way before a more democratic machine. Nova Scotia was about to enter the new decade when the safety bicycle would reign supreme.

1892·1900

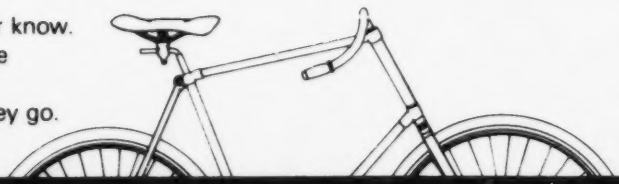
Safeties

The earliest mass-produced safeties had a cross-frame design that resembled the old velocipede - a single down tube connecting the head with the rear hub. This put severe stress on the joints of the cross and frequent frame breakage resulted. Fierce competition between manufacturers for a share in the lucrative bicycle market, both in the United Sates and Great Britain, ensured that design experimentation was constant. Each year greatly improved models were introduced. The cross-frame quickly gave way to the stronger diamond shape, still in use today. Drop-frame models were designed to encourage women to try the new machines.

Brakes were improved, although these were used more by sedate or timid riders. The sport relied on back-pedalling; in emergencies the sole of the shoe was applied firmly to the front tire. Coaster brakes were available after 1898, along with shaft drive mechanisms. These chainless bicycles were advertised as particularly attractive for women because they were clean and had no moving external parts to catch at clothing. But they were soon found to be heavy to pedal, and removal of the back wheel was difficult - a real drawback considering the frequency of punctures on Victorian roads. There was still no freewheel mechanism, so foot-rests were often provided on the front forks to avoid the whirling pedals when coasting downhill.

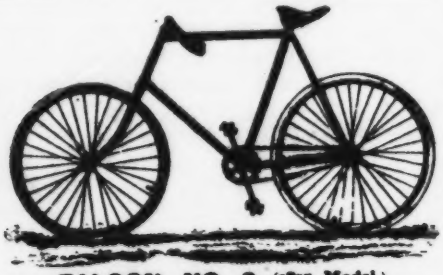
Perhaps the most influential change took place in relation to tires. Until the late 1880s all bicycles, both high wheel and safety, were equipped with hard rubber tires glued to the rim. Cushion tries, consisting of a thick outer layer of rubber enclosing a hollow core, were popular for a short time in the early 1890s. They were quickly

Speed! Speed! Speed!
'Tis all he can think of or know.
No pity he feels for those
lacking wheels
Who foot it wherever they go.



superseded by the pneumatic tire, developed in Ireland by John Boyd Dunlop in 1888 and available as an option from most makers by 1892. This new tire consisted of a single tube holding compressed air, enclosed by a heavy canvas casing cemented to the rim and protected from road wear by a rubber tread. Lightweight laminated wooden rims began to be used a few years later. The improvement in riding comfort and smoothness was enormous.

— T. EATON CO. Ltd., 190 Yonge St., Toronto.



FALCON, NO. 3—(1895 Model.)

Weight, 28 lbs. - Price, $55.00.

"Falconess," specification as above, with 30-inch Wheels, $55.00; with 28-inch Wheels, $55.00.

FALCON NO. 4—(1895 Model.)

GOLD CRANK, LIGHT ROADSTER.

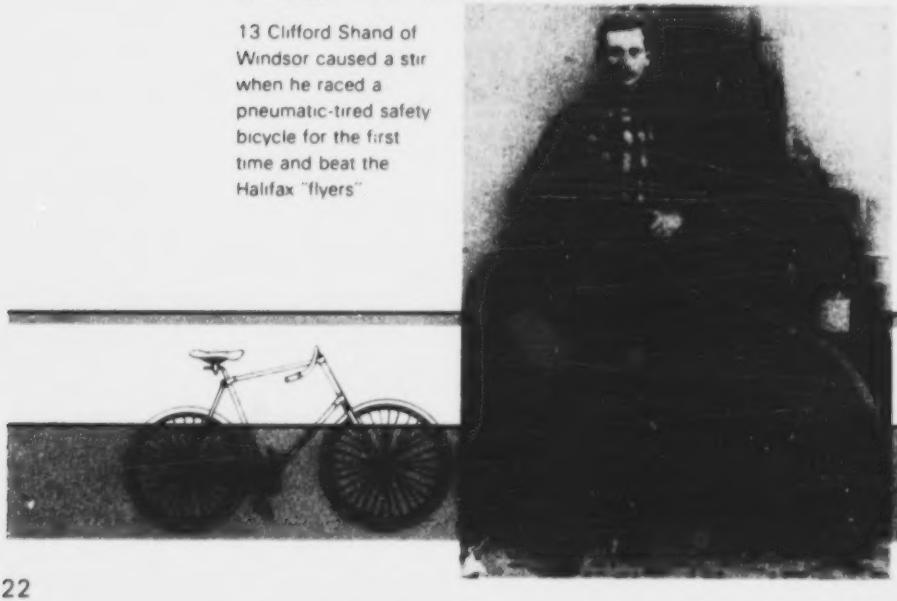
Weight, 21 lbs. - - - Price, $85.00.

12 Eaton's 1895 catalogue offered pneumatic safeties for men and women.

As long as the bicycle was pedalled by direct drive to the front wheel, its speed was always limited. What the safety bicycle did, by means of chain drive to the rear wheel, was to make speed independent of wheel size. Now the cyclist could have the equivalent of a 120-inch wheel or more if he desired, simply by adjusting the size of his sprockets. The lower riding position and improved pedalling efficiency possible on the safety contributed to increased speed. These factors, combined with greater stability and ease of mounting and dismounting, quickly converted the bicycle from an expensive and elitest plaything to the vehicle of everyman, and perhaps more importantly, everywoman.

Clifford Shand imported a Raleigh pneumatic safety from England in the summer of 1891 and announced his intention of riding it in the Wanderer's Amateur Athletic Club Sports in Halifax. To the horror of the Halifax papers he beat the Halifax favourite, Richard Archibald, riding an ordinary, by a good 35 yards and lowered the Maritime Provinces' mile record to three minutes, one and five-eights seconds. Also in the race and bringing up the rear was George Cook of the Ramblers on a hard-tired safety. The demonstration proved that those who wished to race in future would have to accept the new technology. No one turned out to challenge Shand in the Maritime Amateur Athletic Association Sports the following month. The pneumatic safety had the field to itself.

The ordinaries were given up with reluctance. For a few years races and club rides included both types of bicycles, but by 1894 the ordinary had disappeared from manfacturers' lists, just as it was soon to disappear from Nova Scotia's roads.



13 Clifford Shand of Windsor caused a stir when he raced a pneumatic-tired safety bicycle for the first time and beat the Halifax "flyers"

Clubs

The club life that had been such an attractive feature of the 1880's in the three Nova Scotian cycling centres of Halifax, Windsor and Truro now expanded rapidly. During the 1890s clubs were formed in Kentville, Yarmouth, Guysborough, Bridgewater and Lunenburg. In the Presbyterian atmosphere of New Glasgow it was announced that the local club would have no Sunday rides. The Halifax Ramblers acquired the old music pavilion at Princes Lodge as their clubroom and groups of two hundred or more would gather to picnic on the shores of Bedford Basin at the conclusion of race days. Afternoon and evening rides were planned during the week, the participants gathering at the gates of the Public Gardens to ride to Point Pleasant Park. Writing on the attractions of Halifax, the *Canadian Magazine* pointed out:

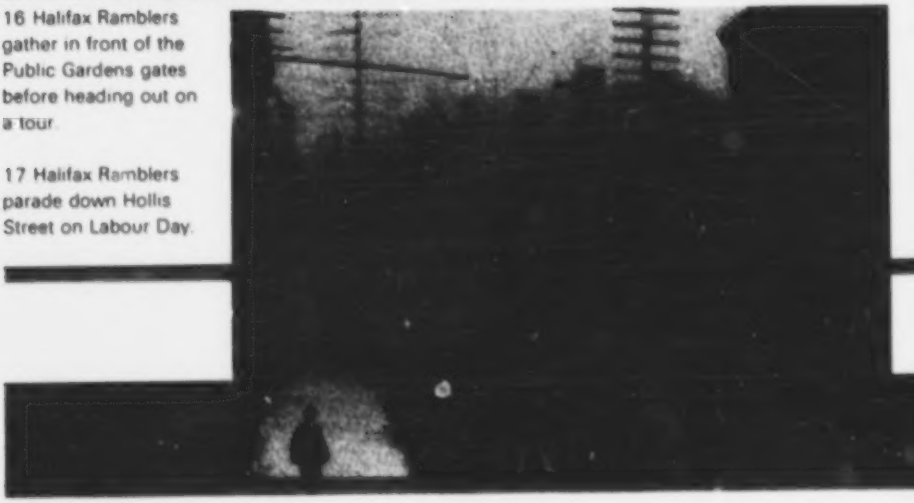
The roads in Point Pleasant Park are all macadamized, being built by the military authorities, and are well nigh perfect. There are some miles of these excellent carriage roads, with their infinite opportunities for bicyclists in the way of coasting, climbing and riding on the level. Their popularity among bicyclists is evident on any summer evening. [18]

14 Bridgewater Rangers Bicycle Club, 1893. The old high wheels are gone

15 Prince's Lodge on Bedford Basin was the clubroom of the Halifax Ramblers.

16 Halifax Ramblers gather in front of the Public Gardens gates before heading out on a tour.

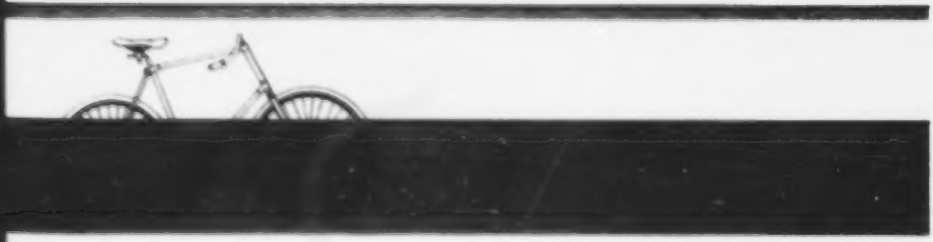
17 Halifax Ramblers parade down Hollis Street on Labour Day.



In 1893 the Ramblers joined the Windsor Avonians on a summer excursion down the Valley, across the ferry to Saint John and home via Amherst. The Avonians maintained an active program of rides and races in Windsor as the formal uniform and organization was gradually dropped. Their clubroom was in the Bennett Smith building on Water Street, tourists were encouraged to contact them there, just as visitors to Halifax could reach the Ramblers through a message left at the Queen Hotel. Club dinners and meetings were often held at the Shand's house at the top of Ferry Hill, where songs, humorous poetry and laughter accompanied on oyster supper prepared by Mrs. Shand Senior.

Windsor prided itself on organizing the best Dominion Day Sports Meets in the province, with special trains bringing competitors from Halifax. A parade of 100 wheelmen formed to ride from the railway station to the new athletic grounds overlooking the Avon River.

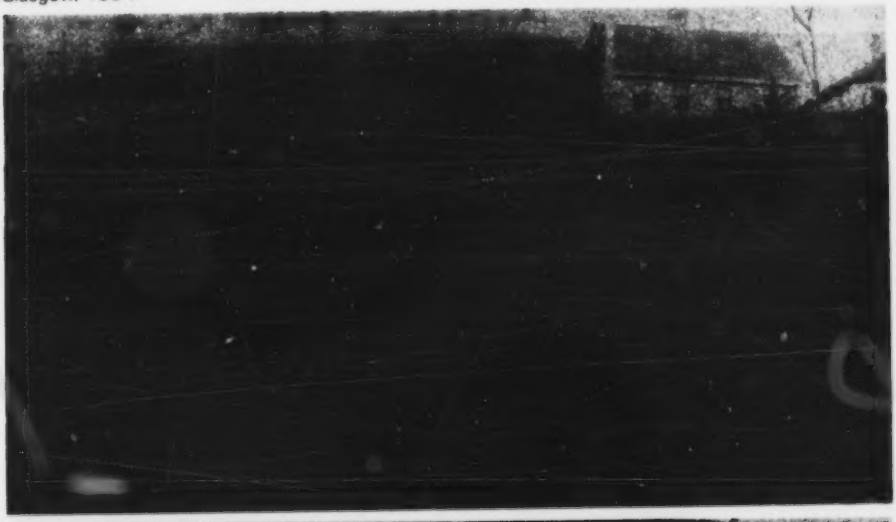
18 The Avonian Sextet in Kentville. That's Clifford Shand with the big pneumatic tires.

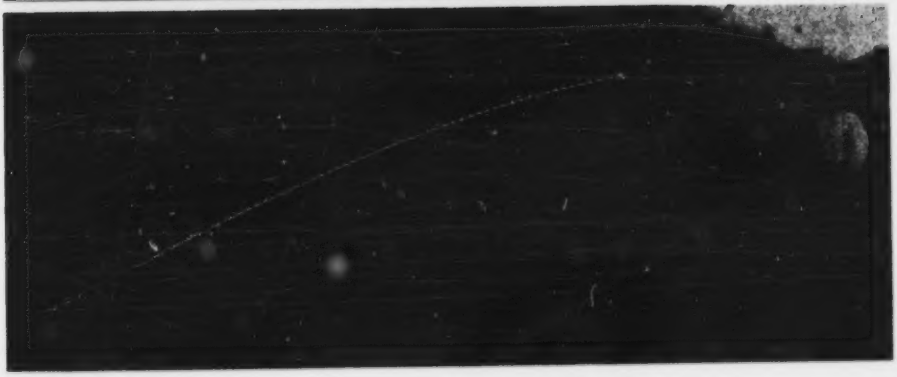


Clifford Shand became Chief Consul of the Maritime District of the Canadian Wheelmen's Association in 1893 and was an energetic supporter of the national organization. He publicly refuted claims by Saint John that all bicyclists in the Maritime Provinces were in favour of joining the League of American Wheelmen and claimed that soon the whole of his District would be in the CWA in force. CWA Championship Meets for the Maritime District were held in Windsor in 1894 and 1895. The *Maritime Road Book*, a cyclists' guide to the Maritime provinces, listed 42 hotels in Nova Scotia providing special rates to CWA members and also suggested touring routes. The Chief Consul announced in the press the arrangements that had been made with the six railroads and several ferries of the region to carry bicycles free when accompanied by a person holding a first-class ticket as the railways bowed to pressure from cycling organizations.

19 Three women cyclists appear in this 1895 photo of the Lunenburg Bicycle Club.

20 The Rovers of New Glasgow, 1894.





Touring

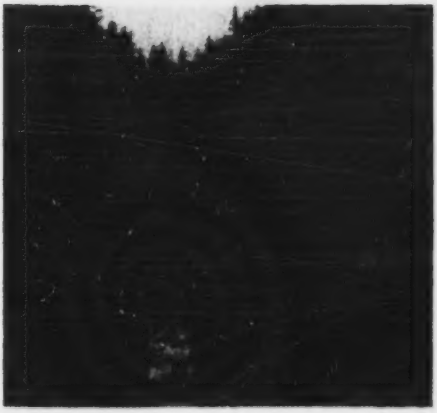
Cheerful groups like the Big Four from the Boston area toured Nova Scotia photographing everything they saw - log bridges, teams of oxen on the roads along the South Shore and themselves and their bicycles relaxing in the Public Gardens when they finally reached Halifax.

Karl Creelman joined the increasingly popular fad for really long-distance touring. "I had a feeling of unrest, and grew dissatisfied with my surroundings in Bible Hill",[17] he said as he started off alone on his Brantford Red Bird for a round-the-world cycle trip in 1899. He took no money with him, impulsively giving away the three cents he had in his pocket to some newsboys who turned out to watch his departure.

21 Cycling tourists -- the Big Four from the Boston area visit Nova Scotia.

22 The Big Four near Liverpool in 1895. Conditions like this led wheelmen to pressure government for better roads.

23 Two of the Big Four strike a classic pose at Fort Anne near Annapolis.



He supported himself by picking up odd jobs, selling a special ink preparation and working his passage on the sailing ships that carried him across the Pacific. His trip took him two years, during which he travelled through the United States, Australia, Ceylon, India, Egypt, the British Isles and parts of Europe, covering 15,200 miles. The *Truro Daily News* greeted his return home in 1901 with banner headlines:

About 25 friends of young Creelman, on their silent steeds, met him at Lower Onslow, and escorted him, as a guard of honor, into town. Shortly after meeting his friends, the tire on the hind wheel of his faithful "Red Bird" collapsed for the second time...and as he headed the procession of wheelmen up Prince Street and onto the Railway Esplanade, the bumping and rattling of the wheel sounded indeed emblematic of a rough trip.[18]

A thousand people cheered as he was hoisted onto the shoulders of his friends on the verandah of the Learmont Hotel.

Some of the worst roads that Creelman encountered on his trip were Canadian. Wheelmen formed an early pressure group for their improvement. "What are the cyclists going to say about the number of loose, round and broken stones on Water Street that allure the luckless rider to a fall and let the 'atmosphere' out of his tires?", demanded the *Pictou Advocate* of the town authorities in 1895. A deputation of cyclists from the Halifax Ramblers urged the Government in 1897 to improve the roads. As Premier Murray and members of the Legislature were listed among the "wild scorchers" to be seen on Spring Garden Road in the evenings, the cyclists hoped for results.

24 Karl Creelman, "the Truro Globetrotter", rode his Brantford Red Bird round-the-world 1899-1901.

Business

During the 1890s, the decade of the Great Bicycle Boom, prices lowered sufficiently to bring the bicycle within reach of the average person. As early as 1889 A.T. Lane & Co., an establishment founded by the man who had brought the bicycle to Canada in 1876, was advertising second-hand wheels in the *Londonderry Times*. Manufacturers quickly realized that by introducing new and highly promoted changes in their models each year, they could persuade cyclists to trade in their wheels in the spring for something different and more up to date - the first use of built-in obsolescence in merchandising. A bicycle auction took place in Halifax in 1896, lower-priced wheels going for as little as $12 and $14 when top-of-the-line new models were still selling for $100 and $125. When department stores such as Eatons began selling their own brand name bicycles at $60, many of the major manufacturers brought out a cheaper line to compete.

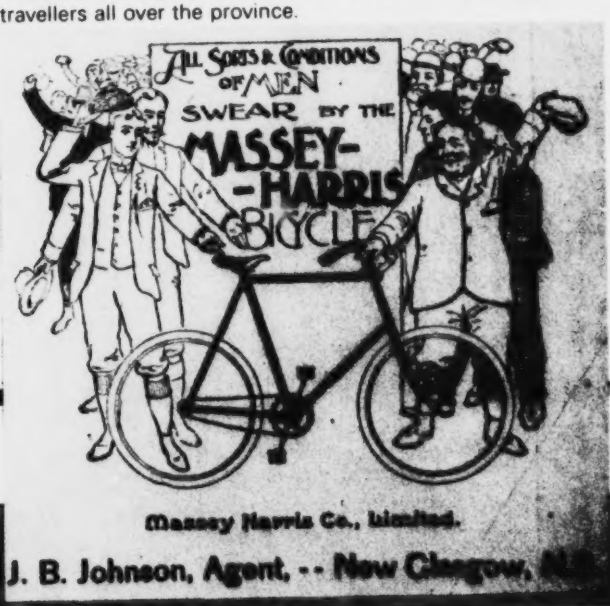
Agents and dealers were appointed by all the major manufacturers in small towns across the province and fierce advertising campaigns between competing dealers began early each spring. The editor of the *LaHave Gazette* felt a little left out: "The bicycle season has commenced and each dealer is discussing the good qualities of the

25 These flat boxes contain a shipment of 150 bicycles for the prosperous Yarmouth Cycle Company c1905. See the motorcycle?

wheels he handles. Fortune seems to smile on many who are thus able to provide themselves with nice new bikes, but the only wheel we feel able to invest in is a wheelbarrow."[19] He was in the minority. The virtues of the Red Bird, Columbia, Massey-Harris, Victor and Orient were hotly contested by the agents of the Cleveland, Waverley, Beeston Humber and Sterns "Yellow Fellow" which promised to be a "hummer for the summer".

R.L. Archibald, the Halifax "flyer", managed the bicycle department at Clayton Brothers in Halifax. His racing rival, Clifford Shand, had set up a bicycle department in his father's shoe business in Windsor some years before, where records show he corresponded with at least 27 Canadian and American manufacturers and three in England. Bicycles were good business in the 1890s and everyone tried to get in on the act, whatever their normal line of trade.

Frank Robbins, agent for Massey-Harris bicycles, established the Yarmouth Cycle Company in 1894. When the Massey-Harris bicycle department was absorbed into the Canada Cycle and Motor Company (CCM) conglomerate in 1899, he transferred to Saint John as CCM's Maritime manager, but continued to run his Yarmouth business. Like many another bicycle dealer when the Great Bicycle Boom ended, he diversified. The Yarmouth Cycle Company expanded its business to include motorcycles, cars, talking machines, typewriters and safes, but even in the early twentieth century it remained the largest distributor of bicycles in Nova Scotia, employing travellers all over the province.



26 Bicycles for everyman -- by the late 1890's advertisers were aiming at the mass market.

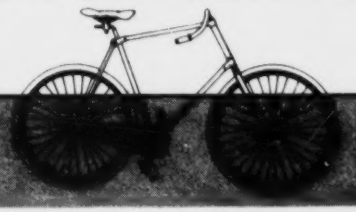
Women

A great deal of bicycle advertising was directed at women. With the advent of the pneumatic tire and safety frame, women were at last able to take advantage of the excitement that had absorbed their menfolk for so many years, and they took to the wheel with delight. The Avonian Cycle Club voted to admit women in 1892, and Mrs. Shand had a special teal blue cycling costume made up. Canadian women, on the whole, rejected the "rational dress" of bloomers and trouser suits that caused so much unfavourable comment elsewhere. Instead, they used divided or shorter skirts with gaiters, hoping that the laced protector on their back mudguard would prevent their skirt catching in the chain and literally winding them off the bicycle.

Etiquette books instructed new cyclists on correct cycling behaviour:

The maiden who is a stickler for form does all her cycling in the hours that come before noon — unless there be a special meet, a bicycle tea for instance, or a spin by moonlight... If one possesses such a

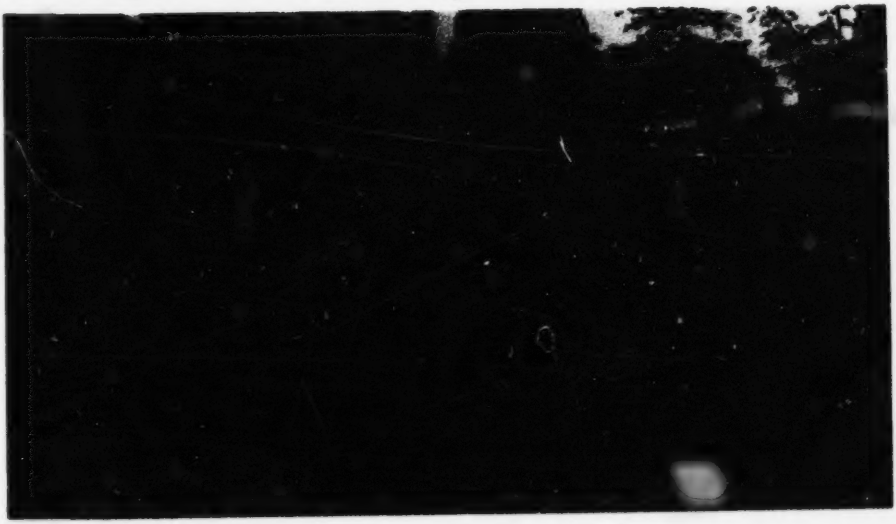
27 Bicycles brought a new freedom and independence to Victorian women.



commodity as a brother or a husband he can always be made useful on a cycling excursion. Never is a man better able to show for what purpose he was made than upon such occasions...Very gallant escorts use a tow rope when accompanying a lady upon a wheeling spin. These are managed in various ways: one consists of an India-rubber door-spring just strong enough to stretch a little with the strain, and about six feet of shade cord. One end is attached to the lady's wheel at the lamp bracket or brake rod by a spring swivel, and the other end is hooked to the escort's handle bar in such a way that

28 A turn-of-the-century bicycle suit.

29 Men and women cyclists in Parrsboro c1898. Look for skirt guards over the back wheels to keep skirts out of the spokes.



he can set it free in a moment, if necessary. When he has finished towing he drops back to the lady's side, hanging the loose end of the cord over her shoulder, to be ready for the next hill.[20]

At a time when higher education, women's suffrage and the movement for dress reform were all topics of heated discussion, the bicycle became one more liberating influence on the restricted lifestyle of Victorian women. The *Halifax Herald* strongly supported this liberation in an article entitled "Bicycling that Fascinates Fair Women", published in 1895:

Bicycling clears away all cob-webs from the brain and brings one closer to Nature's heart than anything else, and it has done more to brighten women's lives and faces than we will ever know. It is a splendid exercise, is perfectly modest, there's nothing like it to give one knowledge of the surrounding country, and it is here to stay![21]

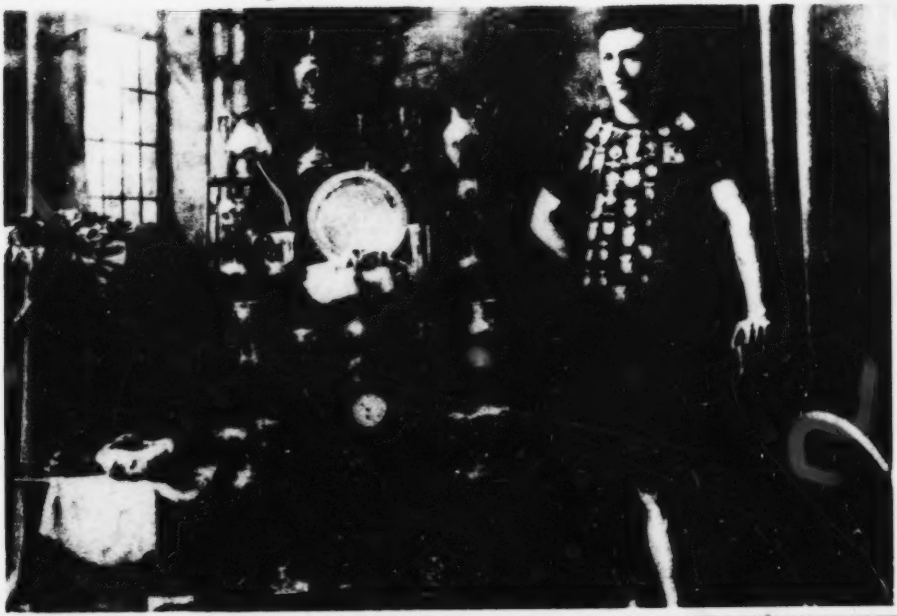
Manufacturers like the Dunlop Tire Company wooed female customers: "The Dunlop detachable tire is so simple that even a dainty young girl requires no other tools to repair it than her Hands!" The New Woman of the 1890s who could not skate was urged to fit a McCready ice bicycle attachment to her wheel. This element of freedom and independence greatly appealed to women. They were no longer left at home, but could go on outings with their women friends or accompany their young man on an equal basis. Once tasted, the new freedom was hard to abandon.

30 Students from the Convent of the Sacred Heart display cycling fashions and pneumatic-tired safeties in the Halifax Public Gardens, c1897.

Racing

Cycle racing remained the province of the males. New tracks were built at New Glasgow, Lunenburg and Truro as the Amateur Athletic Movement flourished. The Wanderer's Club track at Halifax was considered by the *Boston Journal* to be one of the best in North America and their meets were run to a very high standard.

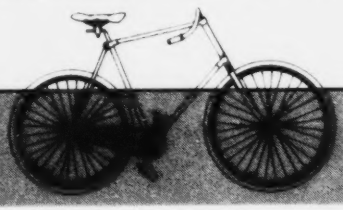
The old rivals, Clifford Shand and R.L. Archibald joined the Century Road Club which gave a special bar to riders who completed a hundred miles in a specified time. They broke each other's Maritime records year after year in a rivalry that lasted the decade. In 1900, Shand, who was by then a veteran of 37, set a new record of seven hours nine minutes on the sandy roads between Windsor and Kingston. In 1984 young riders taking part in the Shand Challenge



Race sponsored by the town of Windsor lowered that time to four hours eighteen minutes on their lightweight ten-speed racing bicycles.

At the Wanderer's Sports, Thomas Naas from Lunenburg challenged three other top racers of the 1890s - George Laidlaw and A.H. Jost of the Wanderer's Club and Ralph Smith of Windsor. Naas trained by riding 15 to 20 miles three or four days a week, paced by his friend Roger Conrad. Often he raced the regular steamer down the South Shore; he let go the lines of the boat as she left Lunenburg, jumped on his bicycle and was waiting for her on the dock when she reached Liverpool. Naas's father, Captain George Naas, was one of the founders of the Lunenburg Club and with several others built the bicycle track just outside the town on the Bridgewater Road.

31 & 32 George Laidlaw and Fred Jost, pride of the Halifax Wanderers. Their racing clothes strongly resemble modern functional designs.

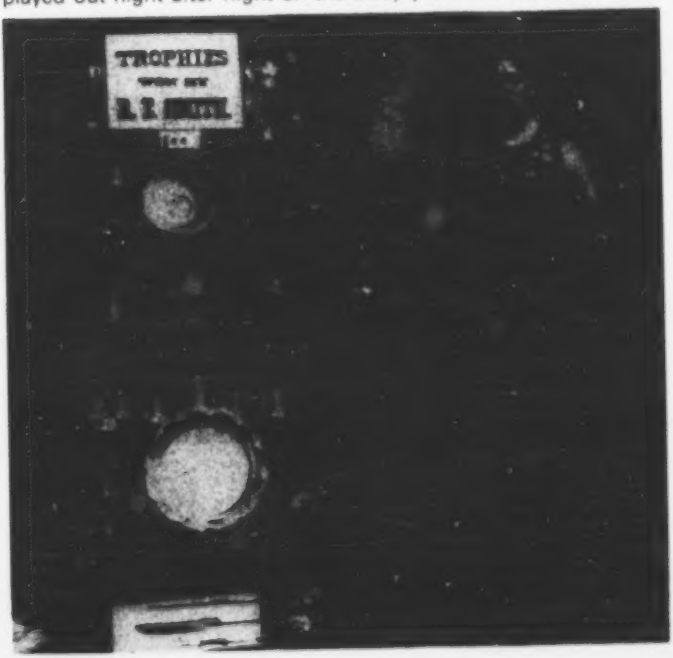


Ralph Smith, who raced on a Brantford Red Bird, was the pride of the Avonian Club. Coached by the Club Secretary, A.R. Shaw, he not only had sufficient points to be placed fifth in the Dominion in 1898, but according to an article in *Cycling* magazine published in Toronto, also had the reputation of being the "squarest and fairest rider in the Maritime Provinces."

Smith and Naas suffered from a disadvantage familiar to many Nova Scotia athletes — they lived too far away from the centres of activity in their particular sport to benefit from regular competition against high-caliber opponents. Their racing careers ended with their success on the outdoor tracks of the Maritimes.

Parents of young cyclists in Truro were alarmed to read in the newspaper that *kephosis bicyclista* or bicyclist's stoop was showing up frequently among young boys under 14. Caused entirely by the hunched attitude of the young scorcher over the handlebars in imitation of his racing heroes, the malady could only be counteracted by "vigorous use of the Indian clubs and other exercises designed to straighten the spine, throw out the chest and keep the head erect."[22]

Through the sports columns of the *Acadian Recorder*, Nova Scotians were able to follow accounts of amateur and professional cycle racing outside the province. It was an era when thousands of spectators flocked to watch this highly skilled and dangerous sport played out night after night on the steeply banked wooden indoor



33 Ralph Smith of Windsor Avonians, "the squarest and fairest rider in the Maritime Provinces" (1898).

tracks of the American east coast. Several expatriate Nova Scotians, part of the end-of-the-century exodus of young men to the "Boston States", achieved remarkable success there, going on to win national and international fame. None had raced in Nova Scotia before emigrating; their training was accomplished in the small towns round Boston where they lived and worked.

Burns Pierce of East Sable River, often billed as "The Nova Scotia Fisherman", held the world amateur crown for the 25-mile distance in 1896. After he turned professional, he continued to break records with remarkable stamina and endurance: the North American 100-mile record in 1896 and 1899, American records for two-, three-, four-, and five-mile distances, the American hour record and the half-mile record of the world. He rode the San Francisco 24-hour race without dismounting, covering an amazing 467 miles, a record that

34 World amateur champion Burns Pierce once rode a 24-hour endurance marathon without dismounting.

stood for many years. Pierce also took part in six day races - agonizing endurance marathons popular in the 1890s and later. Occasionally he paced others as one of a two-to-five man team riding in front of a man to cut the wind and "pull" him on to greater speeds. Such tandem pacing machines were eventually motorized.

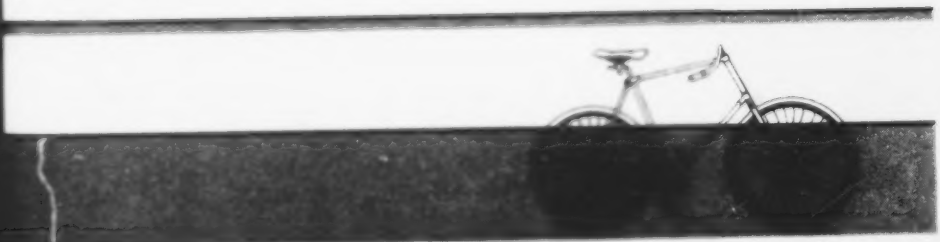
Nat Butler, the best known of three cycling brothers from Halifax, also raced behind the pacing teams at the east-coast velodromes, where his adoring fans hailed him as "King of the Motorpace Followers". In the early years of the new century he joined other top American racers in Paris, where he broke all records at the Winter Velodrome, defeating the top French riders. In 1906 he rode in Dresden and Leipzig, where he won the coveted Golden Wheel Race. Unlike Pierce, who returned to Nova Scotia to live in his retirement, Butler remained in the United States, where he owned and managed the Revere Beach Cycle Track. His fluency in French and German, acquired during his racing years, enabled him to bring many of the top European cycling stars to the U.S. for the first time.

Many large bicycle manufacturers kept professional racing teams who rode their sponsors' machines and advertised their winning qualities. Several members of the Giles family of Wentworth were members of the Orient Racing Team in 1900. When the racing season was over they cycled home from Massachusetts with the team mascot, a small bull terrier, in a basket on the back.

35 Pacing teams rode in front of racers to cut the wind. Burns Pierce is centre man in this quintet.

The Peak

Cycling reached its peak in Nova Scotia between 1895 and 1900. The Rambler Club sponsored a huge four-day cycle show at the Masonic Hall in April 1897, a show that had "a magnificent display of Bicycles and everything pertaining to the wheel on a scale never before attempted in the Maritime Provinces". Excursion railway tickets were arranged to bring people from outlying towns to Halifax, and the show was open from ten in the morning to ten at night, with an Italian string orchestra playing. Admission was 10 cents. The ticket gave one a chance to win a $100 bicycle. The *Halifax Chronicle* declared that "1897 will be known as the year of the bicycle craze".[23] Indeed, the bicycle seemed to be the embodiment of everything fashionable, modern and progressive.



The End of the Boom

The Great Bicycle Boom, however, contained the seeds of its own destruction. Manufacturers over-extended themselves in trying to meet the demand that their advertising had created. The increased availability of second-hand wheels meant fewer new sales. Fashionable people abandoned the bicycle to take up a newer toy, the electric runabout car.

Manufacturers in the U.S. formed the American Bicycle Company in 1899; this near-monopoly threatened the existence of the five Canadian manufacturers located in Southern Ontario. The makers of the famous Brantford Red Bird, the Perfect, the Cleveland, the Massey-Harris and the Gendron followed suit to protect themselves, amalgamating to form the Canada Cycle and Motor Company (CCM).

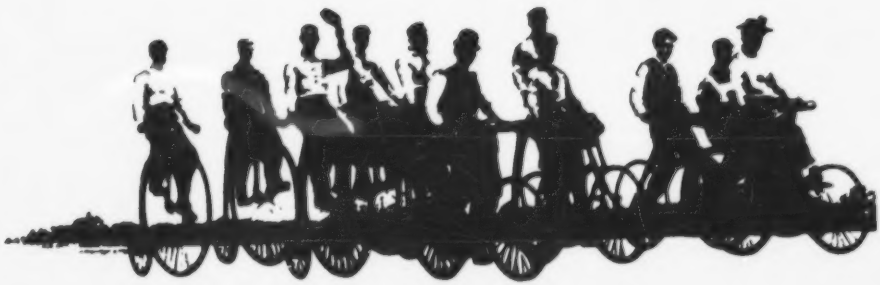
Advertising was cut back, which caused many cycling papers to go out of business and made cycling news harder to come by. Club activity dwindled when the feeling of being part of a nationwide movement was gone. Agents in small towns either ceased to carry bicycles altogether or moved them into the corner as they went back to their regular line of trade. It was recognized that the bicycle did have some drawbacks as a transportation vehicle on unpaved muddy roads and in the snow of a Nova Scotian winter.

What is more apparent today is the difference that the bicycle had made in society by the turn of the century. Lightweight metals, steel tubing, pneumatic tires, braking and gearing systems, the differential axle and ball-bearings had all been developed by the bicycle industry. Assembly-line production, product testing and fixed-price selling were first used by the makers of Columbia and Victor bicycles. Many of the early car companies like Hillman, Rover and Humber were originally bicycle manufacturers. Henry Ford and the Wright brothers started as bicycle mechanics. The technology and manufacturing techniques that resulted from the Great Bicycle Boom made much twentieth-century industry possible.

Cyclists had promoted tourism, producing some of the first tourist guides and route maps. The bicycle lobby in the United States and to a lesser extent in Canada worked for improved roads and highways. Women were encouraged to play a fuller and more independent part in society, and riding was a vigorous activity that brought about a modification of restrictive clothing. On New Year's Eve 1897, the *Pictou Advocate's* large front page sketch of the New Woman represented a sweet-faced Victorian girl wearing an academic gown

over her shortened skirt, carrying her university texts and confidently wheeling her bicycle over the threshold of 1898.

As a sport and recreation, cycling continued after 1900 but did not reach the same heights of popularity again for another 75 years. Today we are witnessing what may be the beginnings of a new bicycle boom in Nova Scotia. Clifford Shand would be pleased at the resurgence of interests in the sport he did so much to help organize. The old commands, first given to the members of the Avonian Club by their Road Captain a hundred years ago, still echo: "Mount your wheels, and ride on!"



Footnotes

1 Ritchie, Andrew, *King of the Road*, Ten Speed Press, 1975, p. 57.

2 *The British Colonist*, Halifax, August 29, 1868, cited by Phyllis Blakely, *Glimpses of Halifax 1867-1900*, PANS, p. 149.

3 & 4 Blanchard, Percy, *I Remember*, NSM collections, p. 47.

5 *The British Colonist*, March 6, 1869.

6 *Diary of Adolphus Gates of Lunenburg*, April 8, 1869, PANS.

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17 From the *Evening Post*, Dundee Scotland, May 17, 1901, reprinted in the *Truro Daily News*, MG 100, vol. 128 #1, PANS.

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20 Pickell, J.P. "All About Bicycle Etiquette", *The Paris Star*, Paris, Ontario, March 6, 1985, p. 5.

21 "Bicycling That Fascinates Fair Women", *The Halifax Herald*, August 10, 1895.

22 *Truro Daily News*, July 10, 1893.

23 *Halifax Chronicle*, April 2, 1897, p. 4

NOTE: Dates given in the chapter headings are the years in which that type of bicycle was most popular in Nova Scotia.

Newspapers Consulted:

Acadian Recorder
British Colonist
Colchester Sun
Colonial Standard
Eastern Chronicle
Hants Journal
Halifax Chronicle
Halifax Herald
Pictou Advocate
Truro Daily News
Windsor Tribune
Yarmouth Light

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Doris Richardson, Lunenburg
the late Gwendolyn Shand
H. Carleton Smith, Windsor
Lilias Toward, Baddeck

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1 Courtesy Special Collections, Dalhousie University Library
2 Metropolitan Toronto Library Board / Harper's Weekly, Feb. 13, 1869
3 NSM N-13,110
4 Photograph Collection, Provincial Archives of New Brunswick
5 Photograph Collection, Public Archives of Nova Scotia N-96
6 NSM N-13,029
7 Courtesy Mrs. Edith Moulton.
8 Photograph Collection, Public Archives of Nova Scotia N-1792
9 Photograph Collection, Public Archives of Nova Scotia N-616
10 NSM N-13,028
11 NSM N-13,044
12 Dalhousie University Archives, Killam Memorial Library
13 NSM N-13,030
14 Courtesy Mrs. Edith Moulton
15 Photograph Collection, Public Archives of Nova Scotia N-2268
16 Courtesy Norman Creighton
17 NSM N-12,974
18 NSM N-12,976
19 Courtesy Thomas Naas
20 Courtesy Mrs. Edith Moulton
21, 22, 23 Courtesy Dalhousie University Archives, Killam Memorial Library, Thomas Raddall Collection
24 Colchester County Museum
25 Yarmouth County Historical Society, Museum and Research Library, N-PH-10-Y
26 Newspaper Collection, Public Archives of Nova Scotia N-2306
27 NSM N-13,146
28 Courtesy Dalhousie University Archives, Killam Memorial Library
29 Courtesy Jack R. Nauss
30 Courtesy Convent of the Sacred Heart, Halifax, Nova Scotia
31 Nova Scotia Sports Heritage Centre
32 Photograph Collection, Public Archives of Nova Scotia, Notman glass negative 9561
33 Courtesy H. Carleton Smith
34, 35 Courtesy Mrs. Louise Knoll

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